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ABSTRACT

To assess the effects of participative management (PM) in a suburban school district in an upstate New York metropolitan area, researchers examined the one-year-old program, surveyed staff members, and analyzed district records. The PM plan involved teams of teachers and administrators at both school building and district levels, providing advice and suggestions and working inside a formal decision network. Evaluation data were gathered through a questionnaire survey of all 56 PM team members and of 62 selected nonteam personnel, and through content analysis of all teams' agendas and minutes and of selected district records from the preceding five years. The variables covered included team meeting characteristics, content, and processes; district employee grievances, collective negotiations, and union-administration meeting processes; and survey respondents' perceptions of PM teams' effectiveness, coordination, information provision, and receptivity to ideas. The researchers conclude that PM has widened staff participation in decision-making, won staff acceptance, improved staff-administrator relations, and reduced conflict over who makes what decisions. Implications of the findings involve PM's usefulness in the 1980s for handling issues of decision responsibility, simplistic decisions, administrator time limitations, school-community interaction, union relations, and educators' openness to change. (RW)

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# PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT: A PRACTICE FOR MEETING THE DEMANDS OF THE EIGHTIES

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The basic purpose of this article is to describe the goals, character and outcomes of a participative management structure in a suburban school district. Survey research and content analysis of district records were used to assess the impact of the new management structure.

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# PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT: A PRACTICE FOR MEETING THE DEMANDS OF THE EIGHTIES

## INTRODUCTION

The theoretical literature base on the expected outcomes of participation management (PM) is extensive and positive.[1] Traditionally, PM has been described as leading to the improvement of decisions;[2] improvement of staff morale and job satisfaction;[3] improvement of staff and administrator relations;[4] increase of organizational productivity;[5] and, increase of staff acceptance/support of difficult organizational decisions.[6] As an end in and of itself, it has been lauded for its humanistic goal of promoting wider input and meeting staff demands for greater involvement in decision making.

The empirical literature base for PM in social service settings, in contrast, is not as extensive or positive.[7] Most PM researchers have found limited or at best mixed outcomes. On the positive side, PM has been found to lead to wider participation in decision making;[8] to lead to the diffusion of responsibility for organizational decisions;[9] to improve staff morale, job satisfaction and commitment to organizational goals/activities;[10] and, to improve administrator-staff relations.[11] Most of these findings, however, have relied on self report data rather than objective organizational outcome data. On the negative side, it has not been found that decisions reached within a PM structure are universally more effective or that staff within a PM structure are universally more satisfied with or more productive in their jobs.[12]

What was hailed in the 1960's as a valuable management tool is now being more cautiously described as a complex and time consuming endeavor, requiring total system involvement and implementation without any guarantee of improved organizational outcomes. In fact, the high priority once given by managers to achieving humanistic outcomes in education may now have given way to greater concern for managing such issues as declining enrollments, decreasing revenues and increasing demands for greater staff accountability and student performance.

## PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

The basic purpose of this article is to describe the goals, character and outcomes of a PM structure set up in a suburban school district in upper New York State. The school district, part of a SMSA of one million people, has three elementary, one middle and one high school for a student population of approximately 5000. Secondary goals of the article are to provide suggestions about the application of PM strategies in managing some of the difficult issues of the eighties.

## GOALS AND NATURE OF PM

The district decision to develop a PM structure emerged in response to analysis of data collected in an administrative/supervisory staffing study undertaken in early 1979. The goals of the study were to: (1) identify needed responsibilities of administrators/supervisors;

(2) analyze the present administrative/supervisory structure for efficiency and effectiveness; (3) analyze staffing needs for the future years; and, (4) propose a staffing reorganization plan capable of dealing with issues identified in numbers one through three above. The study was directed by a steering committee composed of representatives from central office and building administrators, building supervisors, teachers and board members and assisted by an university based organization development consultant.

The data collected over a six month period indicated that:

(1) certain administrative/supervisory functions of programmatic research, program and personnel supervision and evaluation, program articulation within and across units, communication across units, goal setting, co-curricular activities and contract implementation needed to be given more emphasis;

(2) staff members were dissatisfied with their level of participation in school/district decisions and were dissatisfied with the top level concentration of evaluation/control and decision making activities within the district; and,

(3) role ambiguity/overlap of administrators and supervisors and ambiguity in administrator and supervisory responsibilities needed to be reduced (Administrative/Supervisory Reorganization Plan, August 1979).

After the data had been analyzed, the steering committee in collaboration with the total group of administrators and supervisors worked on several alternative plans to deal with the concerns identified in the data. The plan ultimately agreed upon by the district groups and approved by the Board of Education in August 1979 involved

a reorganization of management functions and building/district administrator/supervisor responsibilities. In form, level and content, descriptors typically used to describe PM structures,[13] the plan involved district personnel meeting together as representatives of certain groups at both the school and district level to discuss policy issues and to undertake problem solving efforts. The primary mode of operation for most teams was the centrist mode in which the team provided advice and suggestions to one decision maker (principal, supervisor) or decision group (administrative team). Although decisions were still made (in theory) by line principals or other administrative designees, most team members and issues were publicized and openly discussed.

After the plan was approved, the steering committee worked on specific details of the plan and implementation strategies. In January 1980, the basic design and implementation framework was developed and eight teams were set up: one cabinet for each of the schools and one administrative team for the middle school, high school and district office.

At the building level, a cabinet consisted of all administrators and representative teaching staff. The size of cabinets ranged from five to twelve members. These groups were designed to serve as problem solving and decision input groups to the building principal or administrative team if it should exist. The cabinet's primary functions were to:

... renew school budget proposals and make recommendations;
... develop student discipline policy;
... provide input to the design of the master schedule;
... review student evaluation procedures;
... assist in the recruiting and training of staff;
... develop a co-curricular program;
... develop plans regarding school climate;
... develop a community relations program; and,
... establish school goals and priorities.
(Administrative/Supervisory Reorganization Plan, August 1979).

The PM design plan calls for other building teams to be established to handle specific educational functions, such as design of in-service programs, management of all special education programs, and curriculum articulation within and across schools. Some of the teams (e.g. in-service and curriculum articulation) will be created within this plan, while others (e.g. special education programs) will be modified from presently operating structures. In any case, these teams will not be implemented until a thorough evaluation process of the impact of teams in general has been undertaken.

The administrative teams at the middle and high school included the building administrators, while that team at the district level included the central office personnel and the five building principals. The basic functions of these teams were to:

... plan and manage implementation efforts to carry out district/building decisions;
... establish school/district budget procedures;
... develop the district/school budgets;
... monitor and evaluate the instructional program;
... develop long term planning documents;
... provide leadership to other teams; and,
... make personnel decisions.
(Administrative/Supervisory Reorganization Plan, August, 1979).

At a later time, other district teams will be created or adapted from present operating teams. These teams mirror the teams to be developed at the building level.

A second part of the PM plan was implemented in September 1980 when five district level subject area teams were set up, one each for physical education, art, music, reading and language arts. With these teams, the supervisory structure was changed from having building level positions of curriculum coordination and supervision to district level positions. For example, instead of there being several language arts supervisors in the district, there was to be one language arts supervisor/coordinator for the entire district. The primary goal of this change was to remove role overlap and ambiguity among building administrators and supervisors in the area of personnel evaluation and curriculum design and articulation. The district supervisor's role was to work with each building subject area team and the one district-wide subject area team on curriculum development and articulation and personnel supervision. For the three core areas of mathematics, social studies, and science, the district coordinator/supervisor was to assume a district curriculum coordination function and a grade 7-12 supervision function; for all other areas, the district coordinator/supervisor was to assume both functions across all grade levels. Since implementation of this structure involved humanist issues (e.g. individual positions would be reduced), district level coordinator/supervisor positions have appeared only where retirements/transfers have occurred naturally.

For the five cabinets and five subject area teams (exclusive of the three administrative teams for which membership comprises all administrators), membership is formally defined so as to provide representation from the broadest number of groups. Each staff grouping is asked to elect twice the number of representatives who could serve, while the nominal leader of the group (e.g. principal for the cabinet or K-12 coordinator/supervisor for the subject area team) is asked to make the final selection. Except for the initial team selection process,however, all team members have equal status: team leadership and team secretary positions are rotated for varying lengths of time among all team members.

As with the traditional school organization, the superintendent is still the ultimate authority within the district, while the school board is the ultimate policy making group within the school community. Although teams might make decisions in specified area, principals and supervisors are still responsible for their implementation. Because of the confusion and concern voiced by administrators and staff over whom had decision making authority, formal decision networks (see Figures 1 and 2) were established to indicate the channels through which issues were discussed and approved. Although most district groups agreed with the team concept, they disagreed with respect to whether the teams should have advisory or decision making powers. As expected, the teachers desired decision making powers, while the building administrators desired limited advisory powers (with the exception of administrative teams). The disagreement was resolved (building groups would have

advisory powers for most issues and decision making powers for a few) because the central office administrators affected a compromise. Figure 1 describes the sequence of activities through which school regulations and school policies are channeled. School regulations (see examples in Figure 1) are approved within the school by the principal, while school policies (see examples in Figure 1) are approved outside the school by the district administrative team. Figure 2 describes the sequence of activities through which curriculum development issues are channeled. The network involves building and district subject area teams, building and district administrative teams and building articulation teams so that all key groups will be aware of curriculum issues in the district.

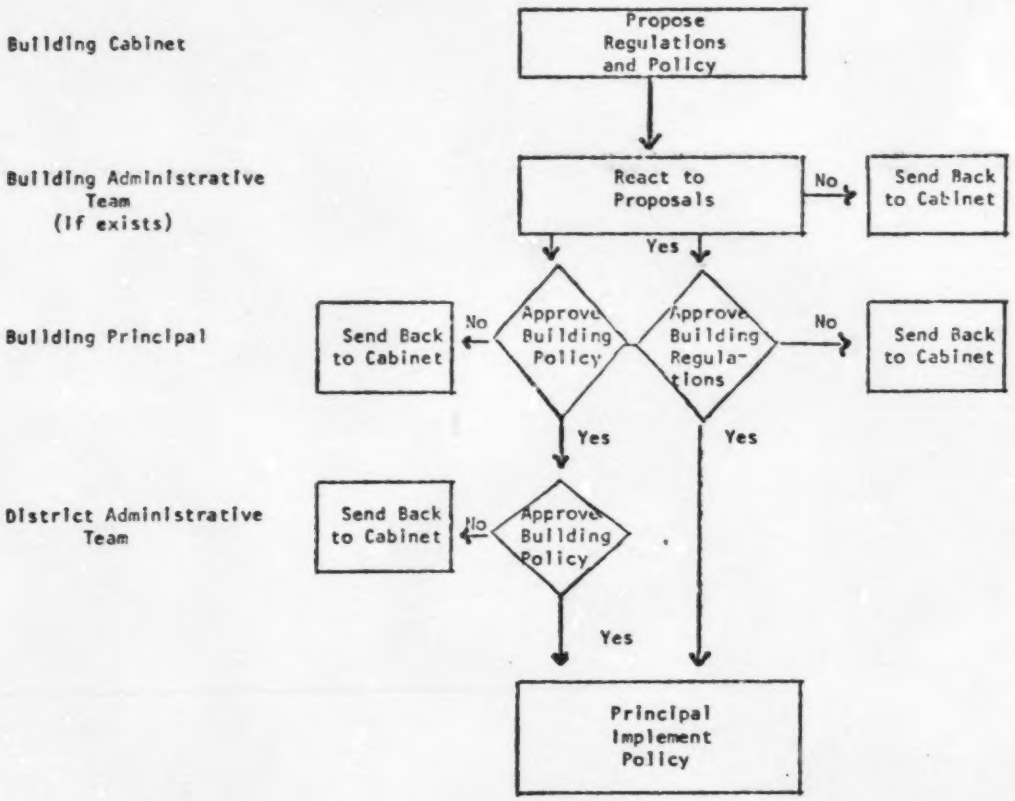
PM OUTCOMES

The initial implementation phase for the PM structure was undertaken in January 1980 with members from eight teams (three elementary cabinets, two secondary cabinets, two secondary administrative teams and one district administrative team) receiving a day long seminar orientation to the theory and practice of PM. By March 1980, all eight teams had established operating procedures and were meeting at least twice a month for approximately five hours a month.

In January, March and June 1981, the outcomes of these teams were assessed to determine whether to implement additional special function teams. (The five subject area teams had not been in operation long enough to be summatively assessed.) The assessment process consisted of the analysis of: (1) opinion surveys distributed to all team members

FIGURE 1

Sequence of Activities for Developing School Building Regulations and Policy




(Administrative/Supervisory Reorganization Plan, Approved by Board of Education, August 21, 1979, 31.)

Example of School Building Policies

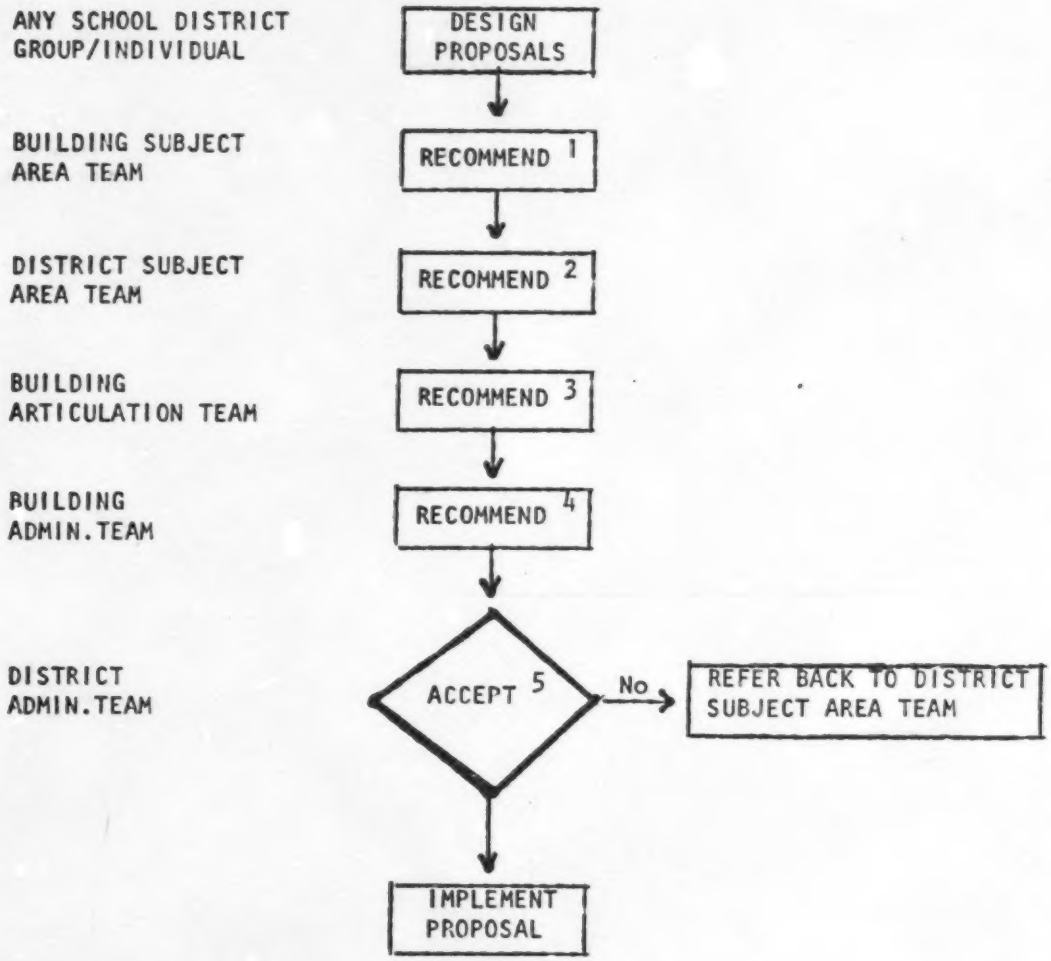
1. Student Marking Policy
2. School building policies can be initiated at any level but they must be referred to building cabinet for initial design.
3. Responsible groups/individuals decide whether topic is building regulation or policy or district policy. Topic areas will be added to relevant sequence chart as they occur throughout the year.

Example of School Building Regulations

1. Student entrance/exit rules. Teacher supervision of students. Bus loading/unloading rules. Study hall (etc.) operations. Student dismissal rules. Homeroom regulations. Xerox, ditto machine regulations.
2. School building regulations can be initiated at any level but they must be referred to building cabinet for initial design.
3. Responsible groups/individuals decide whether topic is building regulation or policy or district policy. Topic areas will be added to relevant sequence chart as they occur throughout the year.

FIGURE 2

SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES
FOR
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FUNCTION*




Key

* All groups are kept informed of all other groups' activities with respect to proposal development.

1 Recommendations are made relative to building subject area concerns.

2. Recommendations are made relative to district subject area concerns.

3 Recommendations are made relative to consistency of building curriculum

4 Recommendations are made relative to proposal's building implementation concerns.

5 Decision is made relative to all four groups' recommendations and modifications to proposed curriculum changes.

and selected non-team personnel familiar with team operations; (2) all team agendas and minutes; and, (3) selected district records. Tables 1 through 4 present these findings.

Analysis of the survey data (see Table 1) indicated that the 56 team members perceived that in the new PM structure:

... persons affected by decisions were generally involved in them;
... school/district goals were emphasized in reaching decisions;
... team members understood their roles;
... the team to some extent was an effective decision-maker, problem-solver and handler of routing decisions;
... the team work was limited in its influence on district activities;
... the team did not emphasize subject area micro-goals in reaching decisions; and,
... different teams did not plan together or coordinate their activities.

Analysis of the survey data from the 62 non-team members (see Table 2) indicated that:

... the teams did provide staff with information necessary to perform their jobs;
... team members were receptive to staff ideas and suggestions;
... the teams provided staff with information on decisions that affected them; and,
... the implementation of the team concept increased staff participation in decision making, provided necessary leadership for school/district operations, and contributed to the motivation of personnel.

The survey responses from the two groups of respondents provide a mixed bag of perceptions. Team members' opinions of internal team operations and activities are generally more favorable than are non-team members' opinions on the impact, influence and effect of team activities and decisions. Despite these findings, it was concluded that the teams had involved more people in the decision making process,

TABLE 1. COMPOSITE ATTITUDES OF TEAM MEMBERS

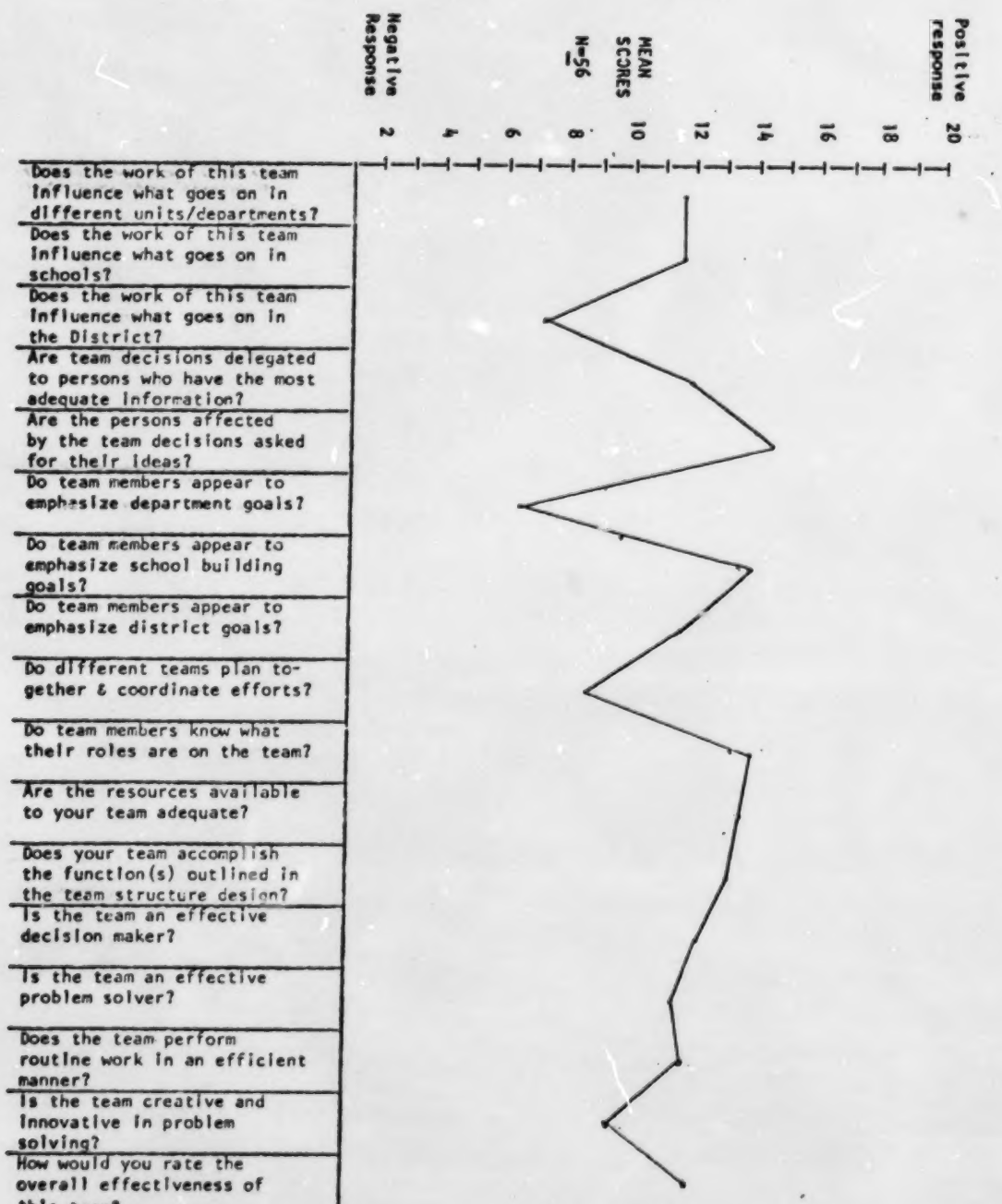
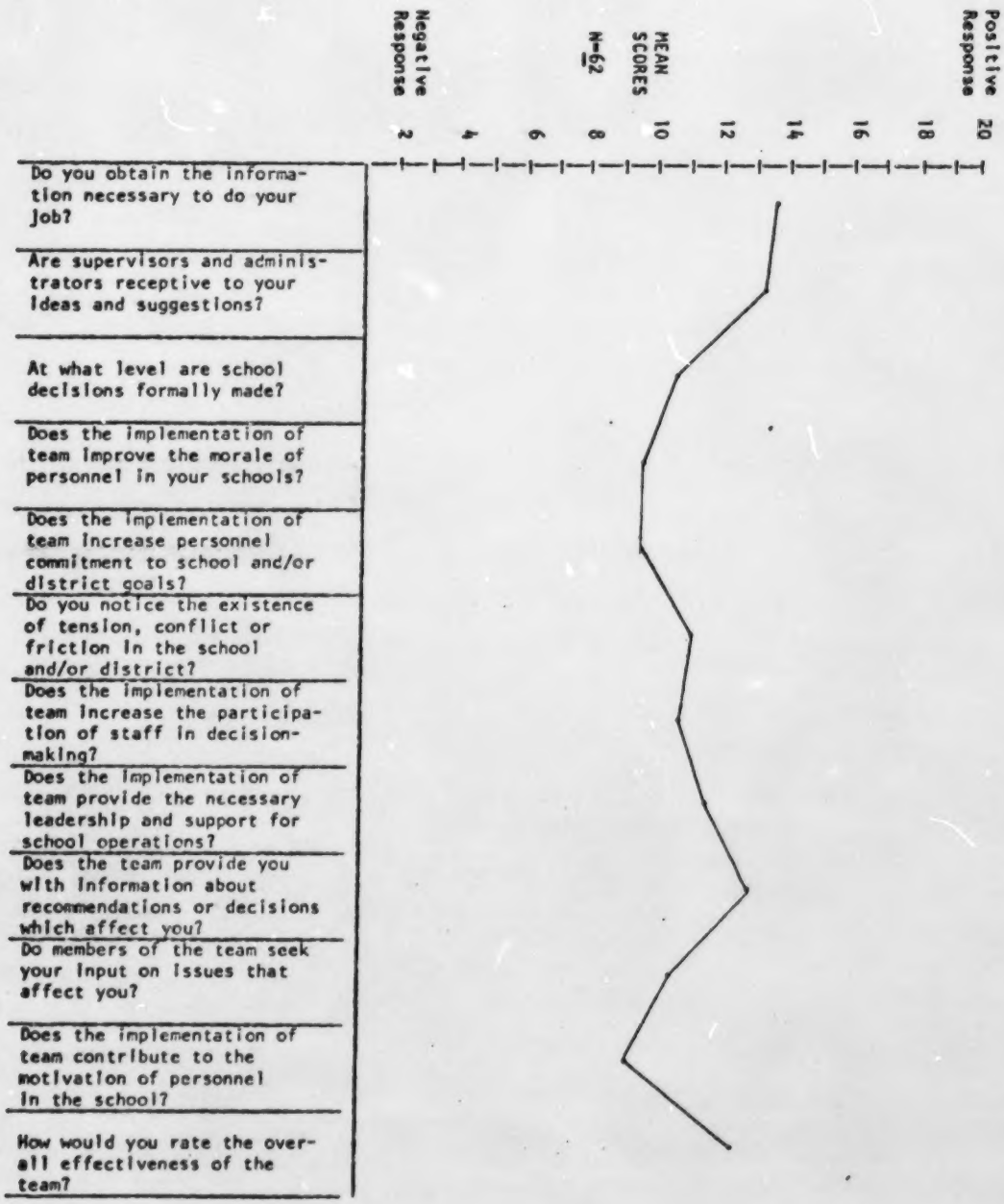

Negative Response
N=56
MEAN SCORES
Positive response
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
20
Does the work of this team influence what goes on in different units/departments?
Does the work of this team influence what goes on in schools?
Does the work of this team influence what goes on in the District?
Are team decisions delegated to persons who have the most adequate information?
Are the persons affected by the team decisions asked for their ideas?
Do team members appear to emphasize department goals?
Do team members appear to emphasize school building goals?
Do team members appear to emphasize district goals?
Do different teams plan together & coordinate efforts?
Do team members know what their roles are on the team?
Are the resources available to your team adequate?
Does your team accomplish the function(s) outlined in the team structure design?
Is the team an effective decision maker?
Is the team an effective problem solver?
Does the team perform routine work in an efficient manner?
Is the team creative and innovative in problem solving?
How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this team?

TABLE 2. COMPOSITE ATTITUDES OF NON-TEAM MEMBERS


Negative Response
N=62
MEAN SCORES
Positive Response
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
20
Do you obtain the information necessary to do your job?
Are supervisors and administrators receptive to your ideas and suggestions?
At what level are school decisions formally made?
Does the implementation of team improve the morale of personnel in your schools?
Does the implementation of team increase personnel commitment to school and/or district goals?
Do you notice the existence of tension, conflict or friction in the school and/or district?
Does the implementation of team increase the participation of staff in decision-making?
Does the implementation of team provide the necessary leadership and support for school operations?
Does the team provide you with information about recommendations or decisions which affect you?
Do members of the team seek your input on issues that affect you?
Does the implementation of team contribute to the motivation of personnel in the school?
How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the team?

had decentralized control and evaluation functions and had handled tasks such as co-curriculum, program development, personnel evaluation and goal setting which had not been clearly or routinely performed before.

Content analysis of the team agendas and minutes (see Table 3) indicated that teams varied greatly in character, content covered and process followed. Because of the variation and inconsistency uncovered in several teams record-keeping, inferences were not attempted. Instead, the data was discussed descriptively. The material assessed ran from January 1980 to February 1981. The number of team meetings varied from 14 to 53 for an average of 27, while meeting time per month varied from three to eight hours for an average of 5½ hours.

The most common recorded activities (e.g. comprising 15% or more of the recorded items) of the three building cabinets with complete data were: setting cabinet agendas, setting faculty meeting agendas and defining cabinet roles, processes and decision structures. All of these activities are typical issues discussed by new teams. Activities that were least often recorded (e.g. comprising 5% or less of the recorded items) were: developing student evaluation or discipline policies, managing the co-curricular program, establishing school goals and priorities, developing a community relations program and evaluating faculty needs.

The most common recorded activities of the three administrative teams were: making personnel decisions, setting school/district goals

TABLE 3: ANALYSIS OF TEAM AGENDAS AND MINUTES

JANUARY 1980 THROUGH JANUARY 1981

| | Mean of Means | District Administrative Team | High School Administrative Team | Middle School Administrative Team | High School Cabinet | Middle School Cabinet | Elementary Cabinet #1 * | Elementary Cabinet #2 | Elementary Cabinet #3 * |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Meeting Character** | | | | | | | | | |
| 1) Number of meetings assessed | 27 | 24 | 28 | 53 | 14 | 18 | 20 | 19 | |
| 2) Hourly meeting time/month | 5.5 | 7.5 | 6.0 | 7.9 | 5.0 | 4.3 | 4.8 | 3.4 | |
| 3) Percent of meetings with major issues in the majority | 29 | 21 | 7 | 4 | 64 | 33 | 0 | 47 | |
| 4) Average number of items/ meeting | 6.3 | 13.4 | 8.9 | 2.3 | 7.2 | 5.1 | 3.5 | 7.9 | |
| **B. Meeting Content** | | | | | | | | | |
| 5) Percent of items relating to team process | 29 | 7 | 2 | 10 | 36 | 34 | 25 | 59 | |
| 6) Percent of items in first 5 meetings relating to team process | 41 | 3 | 7 | 50 | 39 | 51 | 24 | 69 | |
| 7) Percent of items in last 5 meetings relating to team process | 18 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 9 | 14 | 52 | |
| 8) Percent of items classified as: | | | | | | | | | |
| a) information | 31 | 48 | 44 | 41 | 17 | 30 | 11 | 23 | |
| b) discussion | 19 | 31 | 17 | 32 | 12 | 20 | 17 | 6 | |
| c) minor decisions | 48 | 21 | 38 | 25 | 55 | 50 | 72 | 74 | |
| d) major decisions (set policy) | 4 | 3 | 0.4 | 2 | 16 | 1 | 0 | 4 | |
| 9) Percent ratio of items evolved/prescribed | 28/ 79 | 9/ 91 | 6/ 94 | 22/ 78 | 67/ 33 | 63/ 37 | 35/ 65 | 25/ 75 | |
| 10) Most often recorded function area | -- | Make personnel decisions 20 | Monitor/ Eval. inst. program 43 | 45 | Set Cabinet Agenda 26 | 26 | Set Fac. Mtg. Agenda 24 | Set Cabinet Agenda 23 | |
| **C. Meeting Process** | | | | | | | | | |
| 11) Percent of meetings with team process as major activity | 20 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 21 | 22 | 5 | 58 | |
| 12) Percent of meetings with explicit attention to group structure or role | 35 | 13 | 4 | 6 | 57 | 39 | 20 | 68 | |
| 13) Percent of meetings with explicit attention to group process | 33 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 50 | 28 | 30 | 74 | |

*Minutes and Agendas were not formally or fully kept.

and priorities, managing and implementing district decisions and monitoring and evaluating the instructional program. Functions that were least often recorded were: insuring optimum use of community resources, evaluating faculty needs, establishing a school budget process and recommending program changes.

In terms of the disposition of items, the percent of items handled as information exchange only ranged from 11% to 48% of all items for an average of 31%. Items handled as discussion items ranged from 6% to 32% for an average of 19%. And, items handled as decision items ranged from 21% to 74% of all items for an average of 48%. Across all team meetings, average of 29% of the meetings were classified as having major issues in the majority.

In terms of attention to team process, role or structure, 29% of the recorded items related to establishing and discussing team process, while 35% of the recorded items related to team structure or role and 5% of the recorded items related to assessment of the team process. As was expected, an average of 41% of the first five meetings' items related to discussion of team process, structure of role, while an average of 18% of the last five meetings' items did so.

The analysis of team minutes indicated that the PM structure reflected some strengths and weaknesses. An obvious strength was team attention to the processes, structures and roles of the team and team members. Obvious weaknesses were: the cabinets' limited attention to key areas such as establishing school goals and priorities and

developing student discipline or evaluation policies; the cabinets' over-emphasis on short-term functions such as setting agendas and exchanging information on building activities; and, the administrative teams' frequent handling of functions delegated to the cabinets. From this data, it was concluded that the teams, while undertaking many of their prescribed functions within a PM framework, had not yet assumed ownership over these functions. Until this happens, the PM structure set up in the district will reflect a "character of operations" rather than a "substance of functions."

In terms of the comparative content analysis of district records of the grievance initiation and resolution, collective negotiations, and teacher union and district meeting process over a five year period before implementation of PM and during 1979 and 1980, it was found that: (See Table #4)

...there was a reduction in the average number of grievances formally filed, from an average/year for 1973-1978 of 6 to an average/year for 1979 and 1980 of 4;

...there was a larger percentage of the grievances being handled at the local school district level, instead of being referred to arbitration (e.g., 53% of the grievances were handled at the local level from 1973-1978, while 75% of the grievances were handled at the local level during 1979 and 1980);

...there was a shift in the nature of contract priority issues prepared by the teaching staff; a shift away from demands for greater involvement in management issues to demands for working conditions, salary and fringe benefits (e.g., 72% of the teacher union issues reflected non-management concerns during 1972-1981 contract years [last contract negotiated in 1977], while 88% of the teacher union issues reflected non-management concerns for the 1981-1983 contract [negotiated in 1980]);

...there was a reduction in the average number of meetings held by the Teacher Consultant Committee (a union and district committee established for resolving conflict), from an average of 6 meetings/year in 1973-1978 to an average of 3 meetings/year during 1979 and 1980; and,

...there was a reduction in the average number of issues handled by the Teacher Consultant Committee, from an average of 28 issues/year in 1973-1978 to an average of 7 issues/year during 1979 and 1980.

From the data, it was concluded that the incidence of the PM teams coincided with a moderation of the confrontation and conflict between district teachers and administrators. It appears that teachers and administrators worked out their problems/conflict in a more informal, one-to-one, local basis, rather than resorting tc formal grievance, arbitration, or teacher union and district meeting processes.

TABLE 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISTRICT RECORDS

A. THE GRIEVANCE PROCESS

| YEAR | NO. OF GRIEVANCES | NO./% HANDLED AT LOCAL LEVEL[1] | NO./% HANDLED BY ARBITRATION[2] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1973 | 9 | 2/22% | 7/78% |
| 1974 | 6 | 5/83% | 1/17% |
| 1975 | 8 | 3/37% | 5/63% |
| 1976 | 7 | 3/43% | 4/57% |
| 1977 | 3 | 3/100% | 0 |
| 1978 | 3 | 3/100% | 0 |
| 1979 | 5 | 4/80% | 1/20% |
| 1980 | 3 | 2/67% | 1/32% |

| | AVERAGE/ YEAR | LOCAL LEVEL AVERAGE NO./ TOTAL % | ARBITRATION AVERAGE NO./ TOTAL % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre PM: 1973-78 | 6 | 3/53% | 3/47% |
| During PM: 1979-80 | 4 | 3/75% | 1/25% |

B. THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

| CONTRACT YEAR[3] | NO. ISSUES | NO./% NON-MANAGEMENT[4] | NO./% MANAGEMENT[5] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1972-1974 | 34 | 27/79% | 7/21% |
| 1974-1975 | 41 | 24/59% | 17/41% |
| 1975-1978 | 30 | 21/70% | 9/30% |
| 1978-1981 | 25 | 21/84% | 4/16% |
| 1981-1983 | 34 | 30/88% | 4/12% |

| | AVERAGE/ CONTRACT | AVG.NO./TOTAL % NON-MANAGEMENT | AVG.NO./TOTAL % MANAGEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre PM: 1973-1981 | 33 | 23/72% | 9/28% |
| During PM: 1981-1983 | 34 | 30/88% | 4/12% |

TABLE 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISTRICT RECORDS (CONT'D.)

| YEAR | NO. OF MEETINGS | NO.OF ISSUES | NO./% NON-MANAGEMENT | NO./% MANAGEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1974[6] | 6 | 30 | 24/80% | 6/20% |
| 1975 | 7 | 43 | 34/79% | 9/21% |
| 1976 | 6 | 27 | 19/70% | 8/30% |
| 1977 | 7 | 27 | 15/56% | 12/44% |
| 1978 | 5 | 15 | 8/53% | 7/47% |
| 1979 | 2 | 5 | 4/80% | 1/20% |
| 1980 | 3 | 9 | 4/44% | 5/56% |

| | MEETINGS AVERAGE/ YEAR | ISSUES AVERAGE/ YEAR | AVG.NO. & TOTAL % NON-MANAGEMENT | AVG.NO. & TOTAL % MANAGEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre PM: 1974-1978 | 6 | 28 | 20/70% | 8/30% |
| During PM: 1979-1980 | 3 | 7 | 4/57% | 3/43% |

1 Grievance handled internally

2 Grievance handled externally

3 Negotiation process precedes contract year by one year

4 Non-management issues related to working conditions, salary, fringe benefit, professional development

5 Management issues related to personnel decisions, contract and policy implementation

6 Formal record keeping was incomplete prior to 1974

REFLECTIONS ON PM

PM has had an impact on the operations of the school district. At the very least, it appears to have provided for wider staff participation in decision making, gained staff acceptance as a structure within which to operate, improved staff-administrator relations and reduced staff-administrator conflict over who makes what decisions. At the very most, it may have emerged as a useful tool for managing some of those concerns confronting this and other public school districts in the 1980's.

First, with PM, individual staff accountability for decisions has been diffused; there are some issues now for which teams of administrators and staff are responsible. Although administrators are still responsible for implementation of decisions, the decisions themselves are now viewed as prescribed team functions. This is particularly important in those areas related to personnel, student discipline, student evaluation and instructional program where the school community is vocal and critical. If decisions are now the responsibility of teams, more radical or risky decisions might be forthcoming and these decisions might be more appropriate to the present situation.

Second, with the extra teams' input to decisions, simplistic decision making or non-implementable decisions should not be as common. Before decisions can be agreed upon in a PM structure, individuals on teams need to share information and exchange vantage points. This activity usually leads to more comprehensive and more acceptable

decisions. As a result, less time and effort should be spent on those decisions which the district staff will not accept. The impact of this on district operations is obvious.

Third, in time, administrators should be freed up to assume more of a proactive role in research, monitoring and evaluating activities within the district. For a long time administrators have been criticized for assuming a reactive rather than a proactive role. Since the administrator or supervisor does not have to be the one person responsible for making all program and major building/district decisions, he/she does not have to spend as much time getting informed on district events, collecting decision information from a variety of groups or communicating information to staff and others. All these activities require routine treatment, reducing the amount of time which could be spent on long term planning. This could mean, therefore, that administrators in a PM structure could have more time for planning how to deal with issues such as evaluating teachers, designing curriculum and cooordinating the efforts of all the staff provided that support to do so exists at the top of the organization.

Related to this issue is that of the administrator being able to control his/her daily schedule. Because of his/her presence on every team and right (as a team member) to propose agenda items, administrators could if they desired arrange their time by delegating some of the critical planning activities to teams. This structuring of team agendas is a critical function; for now a principal or supervisor can

formally have a group problem solve a critical issue, can channel complex issues to others and can organize a schedule for when things get handled. Reflecting for a moment on the usual inescapable situation: that administrators become chained to immediate and daily problems requiring short range solutions, thus, leading to their having limited (if any) time for other more important issues; we now have a structure which, if formally managed by the administrator, allows for a PERT (program, evaluation and review technique) control over his/her activities. Thus far, administrators haven't given up any of their responsibilities to allow them to have the time for the long range planning. They have, however, taken on more responsibilities within the PM structure. Unless this exchange takes place, administrators will forever be caught in the administrator syndrome. If he/she is able to break out of this trap delegating the important long-range issues to a group which by its very nature can not get bogged down in daily operations, he/she can serve as even more of a gate-keeper to important district options.

Fourth, PM, by providing a formal organizational structure and philosophical framework for the demands of different internal groups, has interfaced more openly with the environment. If one agrees with the statement that the district mirrors the community of which it is a part, then, one can see that a PM approach could allow for an internal airing of the many variant demands and group interests held within the community. If PM teams can learn to handle these differences, as it

appears they are doing so far in the process and structures set up to implement PM principles, community concerns and differences should also be aired. Also, since information exchange is direct, staff groups should be as aware as administrators are of district events. This awareness should make it less likely that problems will arise to mammoth proportions before they are handled. In addition, as the teams come together to make tactical or operational decisions divergent goals held by the different groups can be managed. If teams can come to some agreement on goals, priorities for handling resource allocations should be able to be addressed more easily in the future.

Fifth, PM appears to have helped district management meet the teacher union challenge for control of district decisions. The purely union organization has now found many of the issues it discussed informally outside of the system to be now formally discussed within the new PM framework. Since teams are not union or management instruments, it is more likely that they will be able to make bipartisan, educational decisions. With many of the issues once handled in an union or management context now being handled in a district context, confrontations have been reduced. In addition, the union infrastructure has less substantive issues with which to be concerned.

One final impact of the PM structure is that there may be an environment of greater acceptance for change and experimentation. Since the number of people and the amount of input, debate and time involved

in reaching decisions will increase in a team structure, more people will be aware of the needs, requirements and ramnifications of decisions. With this familiarity, fear, suspicion and threat of proposed changes should be lessened.

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